

A retained intron in the 3'-UTR of *Calm3* mRNA mediates its Staufen2 and activity dependent localization to neuronal dendrites

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Running title: Stau2 regulates *Calm3* RNA in hippocampal neurons

Article statistics: 28500 characters with spaces excluding methods and references, 35 references, 4 figures, 4 expanded view figures, 1 dataset, 2 expanded view tables.

Keywords: Stau2 / RBP / RNA localization / *Calm3* / intron / neuronal mRNA regulation / neuronal activity / iCLIP

Highlights

- Stau2 binds to retained introns in 3'-UTRs of several neuronal mRNAs, including *Calmodulin3*
- Stau2 specifically interacts with **a retained intron** of the long *Calmodulin3* mRNA isoform (*Calmodulin3_L*)
- Stau2 mediates **dendritic localization** of *Calmodulin3_L* mRNA in mature hippocampal neurons
- **Synaptic activity** induces dendritic localization of *Calmodulin3_L* mRNA

Abstract

Dendritic localization and hence local mRNA translation contributes to synaptic plasticity in neurons. Stau2 (Staufen2) is a well-known neuronal double-stranded RNA-binding protein (dsRBP) that has been implicated in dendritic mRNA localization. The specificity of Stau2 binding to its target mRNAs remains elusive. Using individual-nucleotide resolution CLIP (iCLIP), we identified significant enriched Stau2 binding to the 3'-UTRs of 356 transcripts. In 28 (7.9%) of those, binding occurred to a retained intron in their 3'-UTR. The strongest bound 3'-UTR intron was present in the longest isoform of *Calmodulin3* (*Calmodulin3_L*) mRNA. *Calmodulin3_L* 3'-UTR contains six Stau2 crosslink clusters four of which are in this retained 3'-UTR intron. The *Calmodulin3_L* mRNA localized to neuronal dendrites, while lack of the 3'-UTR intron impaired its dendritic localization. Importantly, Stau2 mediates this dendritic localization via the 3'-UTR intron, without affecting its stability. Also, NMDA-mediated synaptic activity specifically promoted the dendritic mRNA localization of the *Calmodulin3_L* isoform, while inhibition of synaptic activity reduced it substantially. Together, our results identify the retained intron as a critical element in recruiting Stau2, which then allows for the localization of *Calmodulin3_L* mRNA to distal dendrites.

Introduction

Dendritic mRNA localization enables neurons to alter the synaptic proteome thereby inducing plastic changes at selected synapses [1]. In this multi-step process, a selected set of RNA-binding proteins (RBPs) assembles mRNAs containing *cis*-acting sorting signals into ribonucleoprotein particles (RNPs) that are then transported along the cytoskeleton into dendrites, near to synapses [2]. Specific regulation of local mRNA translation at synapses in response to synaptic stimuli then allows long-term synaptic plasticity, the cellular basis for learning and memory. Moreover, several other aspects of mRNA regulation, from nuclear RNA splicing to mRNA stability, play crucial roles in the adaptation of the synaptic proteome that is required to maintain synaptic homeostasis [3]. Several studies have recently reported extensive alternative splicing in neurons [4]. Furthermore, alternative polyadenylation in neurons leads to a variety of mRNA isoforms of the same transcript differing only in their 3'-UTR length [5]. Together, these phenomena give rise to mRNAs, all expressing the same polypeptide, but harboring additional regulatory elements that recruit the neuronal RBPs necessary for fine post-transcriptional regulation [3,4].

Staufen2 (Stau2) is a well-known neuronal double-stranded RBP (dsRBP) involved asymmetric cell division of neural progenitor cells and has been implicated in dendritic RNA localization in mature hippocampal neurons [6–9]. Previously, we identified a repertoire of physiologically relevant target mRNAs from neuronal Stau2-containing RNA granules [10]. For some of these targets (*e.g.* *Rgs4*, *Cplx1*) Stau2 influences their mRNA stability. However, only 38 of the 1169 Stau2 targets identified by Stau2-IP (3.2%) show changes in mRNA levels upon Stau2 downregulation [10]. Thus, Stau2 function is not restricted to regulation of mRNA stability.

It is unclear how Staufen proteins bind to their target mRNAs with the observed specificity with several studies coming to different conclusions [11,12], and even some studies suggesting its binding to be non-sequence specific [8]. Hence, we applied individual-nucleotide resolution CLIP (iCLIP) [13] as this yields information about the direct Stau2 binding to its mRNA targets with higher resolution compared to Stau2 IP microarray experiments previously performed [10]. This approach

allowed us to uncover significant Stau2 binding to 3'-UTRs of 356 mRNAs, and 28 of these retained an intron in their 3'-UTR. The strongest Stau2-binding within a retained intron was seen in the 3'-UTR of the longest isoform of *Calmodulin 3* (*Calm3_L*) transcript. Interestingly, *Calm3_L* is the top target identified by both iCLIP and Stau2 IP microarray. Furthermore, we showed that *Calm3_L* mRNA localized to dendrites in hippocampal neurons and that NMDA-mediated neuronal activation specifically promoted dendritic localization of the intron-containing *Calm3_L* mRNA. Importantly, neither neuronal activation/silencing nor Stau2 knockdown showed any changes in total *Calm3* mRNA levels. We then set out to investigate a direct role of Stau2 in dendritic mRNA localization of *Calm3_L*. Finally, we demonstrated that the recruitment of Stau2 to the *Calm3_L* mRNA allows its dendritic localization.

Results and Discussion

iCLIP reveals specific binding of Stau2 to *Calm3* mRNA via a retained intron

In order to get a mechanistic insight into Stau2 binding to mRNAs, we performed iCLIP experiments. We immunoprecipitated (IP) the endogenous Stau2-RNA complexes from embryonic day 18 (E18) mouse brains by using an antibody against Stau2 (Dataset EV1). IPs using a rabbit pre-immune serum (PIS) were done in parallel as negative control. We compared our results with the iCLIP data of other two RBPs (TDP-43 and FUS) that were also produced from E18 mouse brains [14]. Here, we identified significant Stau2 binding in 3'-UTRs of 356 neuronal mRNAs (**Table EV1**). For 28 of these, the binding sites in 3'-UTRs were found in the retained introns (**Fig 1A**; **Table EV2**). **Fig EV1A** shows three examples of such mRNAs with Stau2 binding sites within a retained 3'-UTR intron. Among these, *Calm3* mRNA stood out as the top Stau2 mRNA target with a retained 3'-UTR intron and with 0.24% of all iCLIP tags on mRNAs originating from *Calm3*. This binding was specific for *Calm3* transcripts, but not the other calmodulin orthologs (*Calm1*, *Calm2*) [15], that do not contain any crosslink clusters. This was confirmed by IP experiments: only *Calm3* transcripts were highly enriched in the immunoprecipitates of Stau2-containing RNPs (**Fig 1B**) [10], but no enrichment was obtained with control PIS IPs. In rat brain, three mRNA isoforms of *Calm3* have been reported, which differ in their 3'-UTR length [15]. In primary rat cortical

neurons, we only observed the presence of two isoforms (**Fig EV1B**), the longest of which (*Cal_m3_L*) contains a retained intron in its 3'-UTR. Our iCLIP analysis revealed that the *Cal_m3* mRNA contains six high-confidence crosslink clusters in the 3'-UTR of the *Cal_m3_L* isoform, four of which overlapped with the retained intron (**Fig 1C upper panel**). The lower panel in **Fig 1C** shows the specific positions of these Stau2 crosslink clusters on a predicted structure of the *Cal_m3_L* 3'-UTR. These positions were located right next to the long-range predicted RNA duplexes. The cluster with most crosslinking (cluster 2) was located next to a predicted long-range duplex, which bridged regions of 3'-UTR that are ± 700 nt apart. This observation is in agreement with the previous finding that long-range duplexes in 3'-UTRs of mRNAs are enriched on Stau1 binding sites [16]. Importantly, no high-confidence crosslink clusters were detected in other intronic regions of *Cal_m3* transcript (data not shown).

The expression of *Cal_m3_L* isoform increased with the development of *in vitro* cultured hippocampal (**Figs 1G and EV1D**) and rat cortical neurons (RCN) (**Figs 1H and EV1C**) and reached maximal levels in mature neurons that have undergone synaptogenesis (stage 5 neurons, see [17]). *Cal_m3_L* mRNA localizes mainly in the somato-dendritic compartment. Also, its localization was restricted to the Map2 positive neuronal processes (*i.e.* dendrites) but not to the Map2 negative ones (**Fig 1D,F**). Importantly, Stau2 co-localized with the *Cal_m3_L* mRNA endogenously (**Fig 1E**).

Synaptic activity regulates *Cal_m3* mRNA localization via the retained 3'-UTR intron in hippocampal neurons

Localization of an mRNA to dendrites can lead to its local translation and hence spatio-temporal regulation of its function. This localization is known to be influenced by neuronal activity [18]. Therefore, we analyzed the effect of neuronal activation and silencing on the observed dendritic localization of endogenous *Cal_m3_L* in rat hippocampal neurons (DIV12). The dendritic localization of *Cal_m3_L* mRNA increased upon NMDA treatment (**Fig 2A,C**) and it decreased drastically upon neuronal silencing (**Fig 2B,D**) (see Materials and Methods). Importantly, these treatments did not affect total *Cal_m3_L* mRNA levels as FISH signal intensity in the cell body (**Fig 2E,F**) and qPCR values (**Fig EV2D**) were not modified. Next, we investigated in detail the role of the 3'-UTR intron in the dendritic localization of

*Cal*3 transcripts. As the endogenous short isoform of *Cal*3 (*Cal*3_M; lacking the retained exon) cannot be identified specifically due to overlapping sequences with the *Cal*3_L, we took advantage of a *GFP* mRNA reporter assay. We generated several *GFP* reporters, which contained different *Cal*3 3'-UTRs (scheme in **Fig EV2E**). We analyzed the localization of the *GFP* reporters in rat hippocampal neurons upon NMDA stimulation or synaptic silencing by FISH against the *GFP* sequence. The dendritic localization of *GFP* transcripts containing the intron (*Cal*3_L and *Cal*3_{INT}) increased upon neuronal stimulation (**Fig 2G,I; Fig EV2A**) and was dramatically reduced upon synaptic silencing (**Fig 2H,J; Fig EV2B**). These data showed that the *Cal*3 intron in the 3'-UTR is sufficient to confer activity-dependent changes in *GFP* mRNA localization. Moreover, these pharmacological treatments neither alter the total *GFP* mRNA levels in *Cal*3_L and *Cal*3_{INT} reporters (**Fig EV2C**). Together, these experiments showed that neuronal activity regulated dendritic localization of *Cal*3_L mRNA via the 3'-UTR intron without altering its total levels.

Staufen2-mediated dendritic localization of *Cal*3 mRNA via its 3'-UTR intron

To investigate whether Stau2 directly mediates dendritic localization of intron-containing transcripts, we evaluated the subcellular localization of the different *GFP* mRNA reporters when they were co-expressed with the exogenous 62kDa isoform of Stau2 (tagRFP-Stau2⁶²). TagRFP-Stau2⁶² expression significantly increased the dendritic localization of the intron-containing reporter mRNAs (**Fig 3A,B, Fig EV3A,B**). The presence of the intron in the reporter constructs (*Cal*3_L and *Cal*3_{INT}) was confirmed by qPCR (**Fig 3H**). Importantly, exogenous tagRFP-Stau2⁶² expression did not alter the mRNA levels of either *Cal*3_L and *Cal*3_{INT} *GFP* or luciferase reporter constructs (**Fig EV3C,D**) or endogenous *Cal*3_L mRNA (**Fig 3F,G**). This highlighted the dependence of *Cal*3 mRNA on the *cis*-element (*i.e.* the *Cal*3 intron) and the *trans*-factor (*i.e.* Stau2) for its localization. Moreover, the *GFP-Cal*3_{INT} transcripts co-localized with tagRFP-Stau2⁶² as well (**Fig 3C,E**). This co-localization was specific for the *trans*-factor Stau2 since *GFP-Cal*3_{INT} transcripts did not co-localize with another RBP such as tagRFP-Pum2 (**Fig 3D,E; Cal3 mRNA does not harbor any consensus sites for Pum2 binding). Control experiments showed that Pum2 does not alter either the *Cal*3_L or *Cal*3_{INT} reporter expression in luciferase expression assays (data not shown).**

Endogenous Stau2 regulates dendritic localization of *Calm3_L* mRNA

Staufen forms RNPs that mediate localization of its target mRNAs in the *Drosophila* oocyte [19,20]. The mammalian homolog Stau2 has been implicated in dendritic mRNA localization [6,8], however, a precise mechanism and its specificity remains elusive. In order to investigate whether mammalian Stau2 directly regulates the dendritic localization of endogenous *Calm3_L* mRNA, we performed fluorescence *in situ* hybridization (FISH) in neurons in culture. Here, we observed that downregulation of Stau2 using transiently transfected shRNA (shStau2) [21] in rat hippocampal neurons led to substantial reduction of dendritically localized intron-retaining *Calm3_L* transcripts (**Fig 4A,C**), while a control shRNA (shControl) did not (**Fig EV4A**). Importantly, the reduction in dendritic localization of *Calm3_L* mRNA were completely rescued when an RNAi-resistant Stau2 (Stau2^R) [6] was co-expressed together with shStau2 (**Fig 4B,C**). Co-expression of Stau2^R together with an shControl plasmid did not further increase the dendritic localization of *Calm3_L* mRNA significantly (**Fig EV4B**). Interestingly, the localization of the *Calm3_L* isoform was mainly restricted to the nucleus in the absence of Stau2 (**Fig 4A** inset) and this effect could also be rescued by co-expression of Stau2^R (**Fig 4B** inset). Importantly, the total levels of the *Calm3_L* mRNA isoform did not change upon Stau2 downregulation in hippocampal (**Fig 4D**) or cortical neurons (**Fig 4E,F**). Stau2 can shuttle between the nucleus and the cytoplasm [22]. The nuclear restriction of the *Calm3_L* mRNA in the absence of Stau2 further suggests a role for Stau2 in the nucleus. Whether this is linked to its role in dendrites needs further investigation.

In summary, these experiments showed that mammalian Stau2 regulates the dendritic localization of the intron-containing *Calm3_L* isoform in primary neurons without affecting its stability.

Together, our study has several implications. Genome-wide expression of mRNA with longer 3'-UTRs increases during development in brain and muscle [23], and such isoforms have an increased probability of localizing to neural projections of hippocampal neurons [24]. This is in line with our findings that the long isoform of *Calm3* containing the retained intron in its 3'-UTR is preferentially expressed in mature hippocampal neurons. Furthermore, it is this 3'-UTR intron that enables Stau2 binding and mediates its dendritic localization. Since this dendritic *Calm3_L*

mRNA localization is regulated by NMDA receptor activation it is tempting to speculate that *Calm3_L* recruitment enables local protein synthesis at synapses. Importantly, Stau2 recruitment to the retained intron in the *Calm3_L* mRNA suggests that Stau2 recognizes a RNA structure as an element mediating specificity. While such specific recruitment is clear for RBPs that bind in an mRNA sequence-dependent manner (in line with our '*RNA signature*' hypothesis [2]), there has been limited evidence for dsRBPs *i.e.* Stau2. In addition, the regulation of dendritic mRNA localization of *Calm3_L*, without changes in mRNA stability or decay, indicates that Stau2 performs distinct functions on specific targets. Importantly, the binding of Stau2 to 3'-UTR introns in other 27 mRNA targets ensues an elegant mechanism wherein Stau2 recruitment can be achieved by selective intron retention. This would then render its function regulatable in specific cell types or during developmental stages. This mechanism of intron retention would be of general importance not just for Stau2 but also in the case of other RBPs.

Materials and Methods

Immunoprecipitations, RNA isolation

Stau2 RNP isolation and immunoprecipitation (IP) were performed in triplicate as described [10,25]. Pre-immune serum was used to perform control IPs. Total RNA was isolated using miRvana™ miRNA isolation kit according to manufacturers instructions (Applied Biosystems). RNA was eluted, ethanol precipitated, resuspended in nuclease-free H₂O and RNA concentration measured using a NanoDrop spectrophotometer (Thermo Scientific). For quantification of mRNA levels in nucleofected rat cortical neurons, we used the Qiashreder and RNeasy kit (Qiagen) for RNA isolation. On column, DNase (Qiagen) treatment was performed before proceeding to cDNA synthesis. All steps were performed according to manufacturers instructions. For Northern blot analysis total RNA was isolated from DIV11 rat cortical neurons (RCN). For quantification of endogenous Stau2 and *Calm3* (*Calm3_L* and *Calm3* all isoforms) mRNA levels from 0/2/4/6-7 DIV RCN or from E17.5/adult rat cortex the total RNA was obtained using TRIZOL reagent (Thermo Scientific, 15596018) according to manufacturer's instructions.

cDNA synthesis and quantitative RT-PCR

cDNA was synthesized from 0.5-1µg DNase-treated RNA using random primers and Superscript III™ reverse transcriptase (Invitrogen) according to the manufacturer's instructions. For IPs, 0.5 µg of input RNA, 0.5 µg of IP RNA and an equal volume of pre-immune IP RNA were used as template. To detect *Calm1*, *Calm2* and *Calm3* mRNAs, quantitative reverse transcriptase PCR (qRT-PCR) was performed using the SYBR green mastermix (Bio-Rad) according to manufacturers instructions. Primers were optimized to achieve 95-105% efficiency; qRT-PCR data were analyzed using the comparative $\Delta\Delta CT$ method [26]. For cDNA synthesis using total RNA isolated from rat cortical neurons, 2µg total RNA for each sample were treated with 1 unit of DNaseI (Thermo Fisher Scientific) at 37°C for 30min. DNase-treated RNA was split in two: 1µg was used for cDNA synthesis and the rest 1µg for minus reverse transcription (–RT) reactions. Superscript III (#18080093, Thermo Fisher Scientific) was used to perform cDNA

synthesis according to manufacturers instructions. For detecting mRNA levels by qPCR a homemade SYBR green mix (containing following components at a final concentration of 1M betaine (B0300, Sigma), 1X standard taq buffer (NEB), 16 μ M dNTPs (N0447S, NEB), BSA 20 μ g/ml (B9000S, NEB), 0.6U per reaction Hot-start Taq DNA polymerase (M0495S, NEB), 1 μ l/ml of 1:100 sybr green (20010, Lumiprobe) (in ddH₂O) was used. Forward and reverse primer pair mix was used 2 μ l per reaction from the following stock concentrations: Renilla and Firefly at 3 μ M, GFP 5 μ M and Calm3 ORF Fwd/Rev 2.5 μ M; Calm3 ORF Fwd/ Calm3 intron Rev 4 μ M, Stau2 5 μ M, pp1a 3 μ M, GFP Fwd/ Calm3 intron Rev 4 μ M, Renilla Fwd/ Calm3 intron Rev 4 μ M. 5 μ l of a 1:10 dilution of cDNA was added to total 15 μ l reaction, in duplicate for each primer set. –RT and ddH₂O controls were used for each sample. qPCRs were performed in a Lightcycler 96 system (Roche) and analyzed using the comparative $\Delta\Delta$ CT method [27]. *PP1a* mRNA levels were used as internal control for normalization. Primer sets were rigorously validated on dilution series and optimized to achieve 95-105% efficiency before use.

Stau2 iCLIP and analysis

We performed Stau2 iCLIP from E18 (embryonic day 18) mouse brain samples using anti-Stau2 antibodies [25] or the preimmune serum (PIS) as a control according to a protocol described previously [14] with the following modifications. At the RNase digestion step, 20 U of RNase I (Thermo Fisher Scientific, #AM2295) were added to 1 ml of brain lysate. At the IP step, 450 μ l of lysate was incubated with 2 μ g of anti-Stau2 antibody for 2 h at 4°C, followed by incubation for 1 h at 4°C on a rotation wheel with 100 μ l of protein G beads (Dynabeads, Thermo Fisher Scientific, #10004D). Upon SDS-PAGE and transfer to nitrocellulose, the region corresponding to the molecular weight larger than Stau2 (>60 kDa) was excised and RNA was extracted from the membrane.

High-throughput sequencing was done using 50 cycles on Illumina GAI. The sequence reads were processed using the iCount server (<http://icount.biolab.si>) as described before [14]. Briefly, sequence reads are mapped to the mouse genome (mm9/NCBI37) using Bowtie software [28] with the following parameters (-v 2 -m1 -a --best --strata) and the mapped reads were collapsed referring the unique molecular identifiers included in the reverse transcription primer. The genomic regions were annotated using Ensembl annotation (V.59). The significant

crosslinking clusters (flanking region of 15nt and FDR < 0.05) were identified by comparing them with randomized control [13,14,29]. The randomers were registered and the barcodes were removed before mapping the sequences to the genome sequence allowing two mismatches using Bowtie version 0.12.7 (command line: -v 2 -m 1 -a --best --strata). The nucleotide preceding the iCLIP cDNAs mapped by Bowtie was used to define the crosslink sites identified by truncated cDNAs. The method for the randomer evaluation, annotation of genomic segments and identification of significantly clustered crosslinking events was performed with FDR 0.05 and a maximum spacing of 15 nt, as described earlier [13], such that the positions of crosslink sites were randomized within individual RNA regions (i.e, introns, CDS and UTRs separately). The replicate iCLIP experiments for the same protein were grouped before performing the analyses. We used Gencode annotation to define the RNA regions, and identify 3'-UTRs containing retained introns.

***Calm3* mRNA 3'-UTR secondary structure prediction**

The minimum free energy secondary structure of mouse *Calm3* mRNA long 3'-UTR (TROMER Transcriptome database id: MTR004019.7.453.0) was predicted using the RNAfold program with the default parameters [30].

Primary neuron cultures, transfections and pharmacological treatments

Embryonic day 17 (E17) hippocampal neurons were isolated from embryos of timed pregnant Sprague Dawley rats (Charles River) as described [6] and transfected using a calcium phosphate protocol [31,32]. For NMDA mediated neuronal stimulation: after 24 h expression of transfected plasmids, hippocampal neurons were treated for 10 s with 100 μ M NMDA in $\text{Ca}^{2+}/\text{Mg}^{2+}$ -free PBS, then incubated in B27-NMEM medium containing 100 μ M NMDA for 15 min. Cells were then rinsed with HBSS and fixed. For neuronal silencing: after 6h of expression of plasmids, cells were washed once with HBSS and then incubated overnight at 37°C in NMEM-B27 medium containing 100 μ M 6-cyano-7-nitroquinoxaline-2,3-dione (CNQX), 50 μ M 2-amino-5-phosphonopentanoic acid (AP5) and 1 μ M tetrodotoxin (TTX). Cells were then washed twice with HBSS and fixed. Mock treated cells were used as controls for both treatments. Where indicated,

dissociated primary cortical neurons were prepared from rat cortices remaining from hippocampal dissections [10]. Rat primary cortical neurons (E17) were transfected using Amaxa Nucleofection (Rat Neuron Nucleofector Kit, Lonza, program O-003 according to manufacturers instructions).

Imaging-based GFP expression assay in primary neurons

Gene fragments of interest were cloned downstream of the GFP gene into the pEGFP vector under the control of a shorter version of the synapsin promoter. As control, empty GFP reporter plasmid was used. DIV11 primary rat hippocampal neurons were co-transfected with 1.5 μ g of reporter plasmid and 1.5 μ g of tagRFP or tagRFP-Stau2 or tagRFP-Pum2 plasmid using calcium phosphate and fixed at DIV12 for performing FISH as described below.

FISH and immunocytochemistry

FISH using tyramide signal amplification was performed as described [33,34]. RNA probes used: *Calm3* intron and *GFP* sense and antisense from a cloned pBluescript II KS+ construct described below. Immunocytochemistry was performed as previously described [34]. For FISH following Stau2 knockdown, DIV11 primary hippocampal neurons were transfected (co-transfection of control/Stau2 shRNA with either tagRFP or RNAi-resistant tagRFP-Stau2 62kDa isoform) using calcium phosphate and fixed at DIV16. For *GFP* mRNA FISH, DIV11 primary hippocampal neurons were transfected (co-transfection of GFP constructs containing different *Calm3* 3'-UTRs with either tagRFP or tagRFP-Stau2 (*i.e.* the 62kDa isoform) using calcium phosphate and fixed at DIV12.

Imaging and statistical data analysis

Images were acquired in Zen acquisition software using an Observer Z1 microscope (both Zeiss) with a 63x planApo oil immersion objective (1.40 NA) and a CoolSnap HQ2 camera (Olympus). For FISH experiments, z-stacks of neurons were acquired (50 stacks with optimal step size suggested by the Zen acquisition software \sim 0.26 μ m). Images were then deconvoluted using the Zen deconvolution module. For quantification, imaging and selection of 40 μ m

dendritic regions for each image was done. Images were then projected orthogonally. The *Analyze particles* plugin in the ImageJ software was used for quantifying the number of spots per 40µm dendritic region that was at least 2 cell body diameters away from the soma. For cell body intensity quantification from FISH images, the *measure* function in the ImageJ software was used. The average intensity/µm² of each soma was quantified.

For quantifying co-localizing events between *GFP-Calm3_{INT}* and tagRFP-Stau2⁶², a deconvoluted set of images were selected and manually scored by two independent observers. Percentage of total GFP-Calm3_{INT} particles (in a 100 µm dendritic region) co-localizing with tagRFP-Stau2⁶² were quantified. We used tagRFP-Pum2 as control in parallel. For quantifying co-localizing events, a deconvoluted set of z-stacks was selected and manually scored blind to the experimental conditions (without knowing whether it was tagRFP-Stau2 or tagRFP-Pum2) by two independent observers. Only the spots that were in the same plane and had their center of focus colocalizing were scored as colocalization events. Individual “blind” scores were then averaged and the data was presented as percentage of totals particles colocalizing in a 40µm dendrite (2 cell body diameters away from the soma).

For all experiments, ≥ 30 dendrites (1 dendrite per neuron) / ≥ 30 cell body per set from 3 independent experiments were selected for quantification. The conditions of experiments were kept blind for the observer until final analysis. Graphpad Prism 7.0 software was used to test the normal distribution of the data (D'Agostino-Pearson omnibus test) and for significance testing before decision of the statistical test to be used. Normalized values were used to determine significant differences with the unpaired Mann-Whitney-U test for samples with unequal variances. All graphs were plotted in MS-Excel.

Antibodies

Primary antibodies: Mouse monoclonal and rabbit polyclonal anti-Stau2 antibodies (both used at 1:500 dilution) [35] were generated by affinity purification from existing immune sera; polyclonal anti-GFP antibodies were a gift from Werner Sieghart (CBR, Vienna, Austria) (used at 1:5,000 dilution). The following commercial antibodies were used: rabbit polyclonal anti-RFP (1:4,000) (Life Technologies, R10367); monoclonal anti-MAP2 (1:500) (Sigma-Aldrich,

M4403).

Secondary antibodies: Donkey anti-mouse A488-, A555- or A647-conjugated antibodies and donkey anti-rabbit A555- or A647- conjugated antibodies (all from Life Technologies) were used at 1:1,000 dilution.

Plasmids

shControl (Dharmacon) and shStau2 [21] sequences were cloned into the pSuperior+GFP vector system as described. Full-length *Caln3* 3'-UTR was PCR amplified from a rat EST plasmid obtained from ImaGenes (IMAGp998L0619945Q) (accession number AF231407), using the primers: *Caln3*_L Fwd and Rev, and then cloned into the psiCheck-2 vector (Promega) as described [10]. For cloning the *Caln3* intron, the following primers were used: *Caln3*_{INT} Fwd and Rev, and cloned into pEGFP-C2 vector via EcoRI/BamHI and then further sub-cloned in pBluescript KS+ vector via SacI/BamHI (for FISH probes) and into psiCheck-2 (Promega) dual luciferase reporter plasmid via SacI/Sall for qPCR on luciferase reporters.

Intermediate *Caln3* 3'-UTR (*Caln3*_M) was PCR amplified from a rat EST plasmid obtained from ImaGenes (IRBQp994H052D) (accession number AF231407), using the primers *Caln3*_M Fwd and Rev, and then cloned into psiCheck-2 plasmid via Sall/NotI. The CMV promoter in pEGFP-C1 plasmid was replaced by synapsin (Syn) short promoter using the following primers: Syn Fwd and Rev. This construct was then used to generate GFP constructs with *Caln3* full length 3'-UTR (*GFP-Caln3*_L) via HindIII/Sall, *Caln3* intermediate 3'-UTR (*GFP-Caln3*_M) via HindIII/Sall and *Caln3* intron (*Caln3*_{INT}) via EcoRI/BamHI. The coding sequence for 62kDa isoform of Stau2 was cloned into pTagRFP vector using the following primers: Stau2 Fwd and Rev via XhoI/SacI. The RNAi-resistant Stau2 (Stau2^R) (in pEGFP-N1) generated previously [6] was sub-cloned into pTagRFP-C. See the section primers and shRNA sequences below.

Northern blot

10–15 µg of total RNA from cortical neurons DIV11 was electrophoresed in agarose–formaldehyde gels (1%), transferred to Nytran membranes (Hybond-N, Amersham), hybridized following standard procedures [36] and analyzed using

PhosphorImager screens in a Multi-mode imaging scanner Typhoon FLA9500 and Fiji software. Fragments of open-reading frames (ORF) and 3'-UTR intron were obtained by PCR and cloned into pBluescript KS+ plasmid (see primer sequences below). Double stranded DNA was obtained afterwards by restriction endonuclease digestion, and radiolabelled using the random primer Primelt kit (Stratagene) and [α - 32 P]dCTP.

Luciferase reporter mRNA expression and RNA isolation

Gene fragments of interest were cloned downstream of the Renilla luciferase (Luc) gene into the psiCHECK-2 vector (Promega). As control, empty Luc reporter plasmid was used. HeLa cells (plated in 24 well plates with 100,000 cells per well) were transfected with 0.1 μ g of reporter plasmid and 0.4 μ g of tagRFP or tagRFP-Stau2 plasmid (per well) using Lipofectamine2000 (Invitrogen). Total RNA was isolated 24 hours after transfection. For quantification of luciferase mRNA levels in Lipofectamine transfected HeLa cells we used the Qiashreder and RNeasy kit (Qiagen) for RNA isolation. On column, DNase (Qiagen) treatment was performed before proceeding to cDNA synthesis. All steps were performed according to manufacturers instructions.

Primers and shRNA sequences

Primer name	Species	Primer Sequence (5'-3')
(qPCR) Calm1	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Fwd TTCCCCCTCTAGAAGAATCAAA
		Rev CCACCAACCAATACATGCAG
(qPCR) Calm2	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Fwd AAGGTTCCCCCACTGTCAGA
		Rev AAGCCACATGCAACATGGTA
(qPCR) Calm3	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Fwd ACAGCGAGGAGGAGATACGA
		Rev CATAATTGACCTGGCCGTCT
(qPCR) Firefly luciferase	<i>Photinus pyralis</i>	Fwd GAGTCTATCCTGCTGCAGCAC
		Rev CTCGTCCACGAACACCACTC
(qPCR) Renilla luciferase	<i>Renilla reniformis</i>	Fwd GTCCGGCAAGAGCGGGAATGG
		Rev ACGTCCACGACACTCTCAGCAT

(qPCR) Calm3 _L	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Calm3 ORF Fwd GGAGACGGCCAGGTCAATTATGC
		Calm3 intron Rev GTCACCCAAAAGAAGGGCAAACC
(qPCR) Pp1a	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Fwd GTCAACCCACCGTGTTCTTG
		Rev CTGCTGTCTTTGGAACTTTG
(qPCR) Stau2	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Fwd GAACATCTCCTGCTGCTGAAG
		Rev ATCCTTGCTAAATATTCCAGTTGT
(qPCR) GFP	<i>Aequorea victoria</i>	Fwd ACCCAGTCCGCCCTGAGCAA
		Rev GCGGCGGTCACGAACCTCCAG
(Cloning) Calm3 _L	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Fwd AGGCCCGGGCAGCT
		Rev GGTAGTCACTGTATTTTATTGGAAAACA
(Cloning) Calm3 _{INT}	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Fwd GAATTCGGGAGCCTCTGC
		Rev CTGGGCAGGTCCCAGGGATCC
(Cloning) Calm3 _M	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Fwd ACTTCAGTCGACAGGCCCGGGCAGCTG GC
		Rev CTGGTTGCGGCCGCGGTAGTCACTGT ATTTTATTGGAAAAC
(Cloning) Stau2 ⁶²	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Fwd ATGGCAAACCCCAAAGAGAA
		Rev CTAGATGGCCGACTTTGATTC
(Cloning) Syn	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Fwd ATACCCTGTGTCATTCTTGTT
		Rev GGTGGCAGCTTGGGGCA
Calm3 ORF (Northern blot)	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Fwd CATGGCTGACCAGCTGACC
		Rev TTCGCAGTCATCATCTGTAC
Calm3 3'-UTR intron (Northern blot)	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Fwd GGTCTCACTGACGCTGTTCT
		Rev GGCAGAAAGCGATGCCAAGT
shStau2	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	GATATGAACCAACCTTCAA
shControl	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	GATCCCCCTCCAAAGTTCGATGGTTTT CAAGAGAAACCATCGAAGTTTG GAG

Data Availability Section

Primary Data

Stau2-iCLIP data were submitted to Arrayexpress. It can be accessed through the following link: <http://www.ebi.ac.uk/arrayexpress/experiments/E-MTAB-5703>.

Referenced Data

iCLIP data for the RBPs TDP-43 and FUS from E18 mouse brains are published [14]. The Stau2-IP data from E17 rat brains are published as well [10].

Acknowledgements:

We thank Christin Illig, Sabine Thomas, Jessica Olberz, Renate Dombi and Daniela Rieger for primary neuron culture preparation, cloning or antibody production. Dr. Werner Sieghart for polyclonal and Dr. Annette Nögel for monoclonal anti-GFP antibodies. We thank Dr. Bruno Luckow for technical advice on RT-qPCR. We thank Drs. Dorothee Dormann and Inmaculada Segura for critical reading of the manuscript. We also thank the BMC Imaging Core facility. This work was supported by the DFG (SPP1738, Kie 502/2-1 and FOR2333, Kie 502/3-1; INST 86/1581-1 FUGG), the Austrian Science Funds (P20583-B12, I 590-B09, SFB F43, DK RNA Biology), the Schram Foundation, an HFSP network grant (RGP24/2008) (all to MAK), an HFSP network grant (RGP24/2008, to MAK and JU), the Wellcome Trust (103760/Z/14/Z, to JU) and the Nakajima foundation (to YS).

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Author contributions: J.U. and M.A.K. conceived the project, T.S., Y.S, J.H.- F., S.F.M., I.R.d.I.M. and J.E. conducted experiments, all authors analyzed data. T.S. and M.A.K. wrote the manuscript with feedback from all coauthors. J.U. and M.A.K provided resources and supervision.

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Figure legends

Figure 1 The intron-containing *Caln3* mRNA isoform interacts with Stau2 and localizes to dendrites.

- A The proportion of cDNAs (out of all cDNAs that mapped to the mouse genome) produced by iCLIP (using E18 mouse brain extracts) from the FUS, TDP-43 and Stau2 experiments that mapped to different RNA regions (*i.e.* UTR: untranslated region, CDS: coding sequence) and intergenic regions (*i.e.* non-annotated transcripts).
- B Relative values of *Caln3*, *Caln2* and *Caln1* mRNA enrichment upon control or anti-Stau2 IPs from E17.5 rat brains. Pre-immune serum was used to perform control IPs; n=3, average+SEM.
- C iCLIP results show that Stau2 specifically binds to the longest *Caln3* (*Caln3_L*) isoform retaining an intron in its 3'-UTR (schematic in the middle). Lower panel shows the specific positions of these Stau2 crosslink clusters on a predicted structure of the *Caln3_L* mRNA.
- D Representative images of endogenous *Caln3_L* mRNA in rat primary hippocampal neurons (DIV15) visualized by a FISH probe directed against the intron (*Caln3* intron FISH; red). Magnified insets (40 μ m dendritic sections) below identify MAP2-positive (box 1; green) and MAP2-negative (box 2) neuronal processes; Nucleus (DAPI; blue). Boxes on the top right show images of bright field (above) and (below) Stau2 (purple) co-staining with DAPI (cyan); asterisk denotes the soma of the neuron under study; scale bar, 20 μ m.
- E Colocalization of endogenous Stau2 with endogenous *Caln3_L* mRNA in the panel represented in 1D. Arrowheads indicate dendritic co-clusters. (*Caln3* intron FISH; green), Stau2 immunostaining (purple), Inset (top right) shows Stau2 staining in the soma at low exposure. The white perforated line marks the position of the nucleus; scale bar, 20 μ m.
- F Quantification of the number of spots of *Caln3_L* mRNA per length (40 μ m region) in Map2-positive and negative neuronal processes; average + SEM taken from 3 independent experiments (30 dendrites each), ***p<0.001, unpaired Mann-Whitney-U test.
- G Quantification of the cell body intensity normalized to area to measure levels of *Caln3_L* mRNA in different stages of *in vitro* development of rat hippocampal neurons (1, 4, 8, 12 and 15 DIV), n=3, t-test; *p<0.05,

****p<0.01.**

H qRT-PCR experiments to measure the relative levels of *Caln3_L* to total *Caln3* mRNA in E17.5 or adult rat cortex and 0, 2, 4 and 6-7 DIV rat cortical neurons; n=3, t-test; *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001.

Figure 2 Neuronal activity regulates dendritic localization of *Caln3*-intron containing endogenous and GFP-reporter RNAs.

- A,B Representative *Caln3* intron FISH images of primary rat hippocampal neurons (DIV12) that were either stimulated by NMDA (15min) (A) or silenced O/N (B) using a standard cocktail containing TTX, CNQX and AP5 (see Materials and methods). Mock-treated neurons serve as the respective controls. Dendrites are visualized with anti-Map2 staining (green) and nuclei with DAPI (blue). Insets below show 40 μ m dendritic sections marked by white boxes. Scale bar, 20 μ m.
- C,D Quantification of dendritic localization experiments shown in panels (A) and (B), respectively. Bars represent the mean number of spots per 40 μ m dendritic section normalized to control +SEM taken from 3 independent experiments. Selected dendritic regions were at least 2 cell body diameters away from the soma. n \geq 30 dendrites per condition; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; unpaired Mann-Whitney-U test.
- E,F Quantification of fluorescence intensity in the cell body for *Caln3_L* mRNA (detected by *Caln3* intron FISH) upon neuronal stimulation by NMDA (15min) (E) or silencing O/N (F) of 3 different experiments as shown in panels (A) and (B), respectively. Values are normalized to respective controls; n=3; t-test, p>0.05, ns= not significant.
- G,H Representative images of primary rat hippocampal neurons (DIV11) expressing tagRFP (purple) together with either *GFP-Caln3_L* (upper rows) or *GFP-Caln3_M* (lower rows) that were stimulated by NMDA (15 min) (G) or silenced O/N (H) using a standard cocktail containing TTX, CNQX and AP5 (same as in 2A,B; see Methods). Bright field images are also included. Mock-treated neurons serve as the respective controls. *GFP* mRNA is detected using a GFP FISH probe. Insets below each image show 40 μ m dendritic sections marked by white boxes. Scale bar, 20 μ m.

- I,J Quantification of dendritic localization in panels (G) and (H). Bars represent the mean number of spots per 40µm dendritic section normalized to control + SEM taken from 3 independent experiments. Selected dendritic regions were at least 2 cell body diameters away from the soma. $n \geq 30$ dendrites per condition; *** $p < 0.001$; unpaired Mann-Whitney-U test.

Figure 3 Stau2 overexpression increases the dendritic localization of *Caln3* intron-containing GFP reporter mRNA.

- A Representative images of primary rat hippocampal neurons (DIV12) co-expressing either GFP-*Caln3_L* (upper rows) or GFP-*Caln3_M* (lower rows) together with either tagRFP (left) or tagRFP-Stau2⁶² (both in purple) (right). GFP mRNA is detected using a GFP FISH probe (green). Bright field images are also shown. Arrowheads in the topright panel indicate colocalization. Insets below each image show 40 µm dendritic sections marked by white boxes. Scale bar, 20µm.
- B Quantification of dendritic localization of the different GFP reporters identified by GFP FISH upon co-transfection together with either tagRFP or tagRFP-Stau2⁶² as shown in (A). Bars represent the mean number of spots per 40µm dendritic section normalized to control + SEM taken from 3 independent experiments. $n \geq 30$ dendrites per condition. ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, unpaired Mann-Whitney-U test.
- C,D Representative images of neurons co-transfected with the GFP-*Caln3_{INT}* reporter (mRNA identified by GFP FISH) together with either the RBP tagRFP-Stau2⁶² (C) or with the unrelated RBP tagRFP-Pum2 (D). Bright field images are also shown. Insets below each image show 100 µm dendritic sections marked by white boxes in the main image. Arrowheads indicate dendritic co-clusters. Scale bar, 20µm.
- E Quantification of the percentage of co-localization of GFP-*Caln3_{INT}* total GFP mRNA spots together with tagRFPStau2 or tagRFP-Pum2 within a 100µm dendritic section as shown in panels (C) and (D); mean+SEM, taken from 3 independent experiments. $n \geq 40$ dendrites per condition. Selected dendritic regions were at least 2 cell body diameters away from the soma. ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; unpaired Mann-Whitney-U test.

- F,G Relative mRNA levels of endogenous *Caln3* transcripts (total and intron-retained isoform) upon exogenous tagRFP/tagRFP-Stau2 expression nucleofected rat cortical neurons DIV1 (F). The total Stau2 mRNA levels in these cells is also shown (G); n=3. Bars represent mRNA levels mean + SEM normalized to control *PP1a* mRNA levels; t-test; *p<0.05.
- H Relative mRNA levels of intron retained *GFP-Caln3_L* and *GFP-Caln3_{INT}* transcripts to total *GFP* mRNA; graph represents mean ± SEM values normalized to respective controls n=3, t-test; p>0.05.

Figure 4 Dendritic localization of endogenous intron-containing *Caln3_L* mRNA is regulated by Stau2 expression levels.

- A Representative image of cellular localization of endogenous *Caln3_L* mRNA (identified by intron FISH) in a rat hippocampal neuron transfected with an shRNA to downregulate Stau2 (shStau2; green). Asterisks indicate Stau2 downregulated neurons (Stau2 levels were assessed by anti-Stau2 antibody staining; purple). Bright field is also shown. Magnified inset (soma) shows a relative increase in nuclear localization. Magnified box on the right shows a decreased number of dendritic *Caln3_L* puncta in a 40 µm dendritic section marked with a white box. The white perforated line marks the position of the nucleus. Scale bar, 20 µm.
- B Representative image of cellular localization of endogenous *Caln3_L* mRNA (identified by intron FISH) in a rat hippocampal neuron co-transfected with an shRNA to downregulate Stau2 (shStau2; green) and an RNAi-resistant Stau2 rescue construct (Stau2^R). Selected dendritic regions were at least 2 cell body diameters away from the soma. Panels on the lower left show Stau2 immunostaining (purple), and panels on the upper left are the corresponding bright field. Scale bar, 20 µm.
- C Quantification of dendritic *Caln3_L* mRNA localization (identified by intron FISH) in the dendrites of neurons as in the experiments shown in (A) and (B). Bars represent the mean number of spots per 40 µm long dendritic region normalized to control + SEM taken from 3 independent experiments. n ≥ 30 dendrites per condition, ***p<0.001; unpaired Mann-Whitney-U-test.
- D Quantification of fluorescent intensity signal in the cell body to measure total

levels of *Calm3_L* mRNA (detected by *Calm3* intron FISH experiments as represented in panel (A) and (B). Bars represent mean values +SEM, normalized to respective controls n=3 experiments; t-test; p>0.05.

E,F qPCR to measure endogenous levels of *Calm3* (E) or *Stau2* (F) in rat cortical neurons, where *Stau2* was down-regulated using an shRNA. n=3 experiments, mean + SEM, t-test, *p<0.05.

Expanded view figure legends

Figure EV1 Stau2 binds to the intron-containing *Calm3* mRNA isoform and regulates its expression. Related to Figure 1.

- A Snapshots from UCSC genome browser visualization of transcripts on mm10 version of mouse genome that have retained introns annotated within 3' UTRs, as defined by UCSC genes or ENCODE. The number of cDNAs that identify each crosslink position is shown in the track 'STAU2 crosslinks'. The maximum cDNA number is shown at the left of each track. Crosslinks in RNAs on the plus strand are shown in blue and the cDNA count value is positive. In genes on the minus strand, crosslinks are shown in orange, and cDNA count value is negative.
- B Northern hybridizations using radiolabeled double-stranded DNA probes as indicated in scheme; *Calm3* ORF in green and intron, in blue (left panel). Ribosomal RNAs (rRNAs) were visualized by ethidium bromide staining (right panel). The arrows indicate the position of the long and the spliced isoform of *Calm3* mRNA detected with probe *Calm3* ORF.
- C qPCR experiments to measure the percentage of *Calm3_L* mRNA isoform in total *Calm3* mRNA levels in E17.5 or adult rat cortex and 0, 2, 4 and 6-7 DIV rat cortical neurons; n=3.
- D Representative images of endogenous *Calm3* intron FISH (red) to visualize the levels of *Calm3_L* mRNA in different stages of in vitro development of rat hippocampal neurons (1, 4, 8, 12 and 15 DIV). Nuclei (DAPI; blue) and anti-MAP2 immunostaining (green) are also included.

Figure EV2 Dendritic localization of *Calm3*-intron containing *GFP* reporter RNAs increases with neuronal stimulation and is reduced by silencing of neurons. Related to Figure 2.

- A,B Representative images of primary rat hippocampal neurons (DIV11) expressing tagRFP (purple) together with either GFP-*Calm3_{INT}* (upper row) or GFP (lower row) that were stimulated by NMDA (A) or silenced (B) using a standard cocktail containing TTX, CNQX and AP5 (see Methods). Bright field images are also included. Mock-treated neurons serve as appropriate

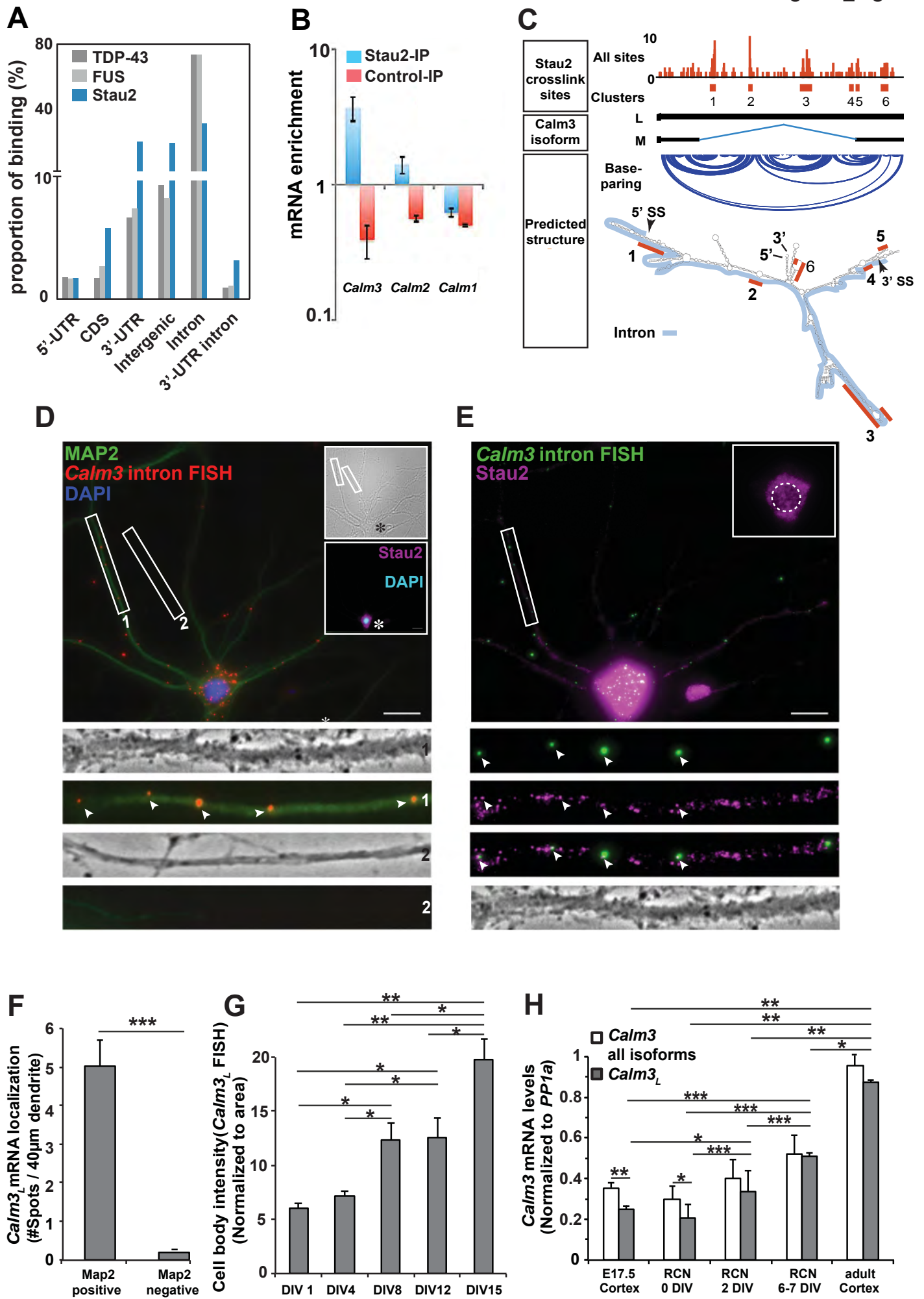
- controls for (A) and (B). These compliment the data sets shown in Fig 2A and B. *GFP* mRNA is detected using a GFP FISH probe. Scale bar, 20 μ m.
- C Quantification of fluorescence intensity in the cell body to measure total levels of GFP reporter mRNA (detected by GFP FISH experiments as represented in Figs 2G,H and EV2A,B) using the indicated *Calm3* 3'-UTR constructs with indicated pharmacological treatment; bars represents mean \pm SEM values normalized to respective controls n=3, t-test; p>0.05.
- D qPCR to detect effect of neuronal activation/silencing on total levels of endogenous *Calm3_L* or all *Calm3* isoforms in rat cortical neurons DIV7; n=3. Bars represent mean + SEM values of mRNA levels normalized to *PP1a*. t-test; p>0.05.
- E Scheme representing the GFP reporter constructs used in this study.

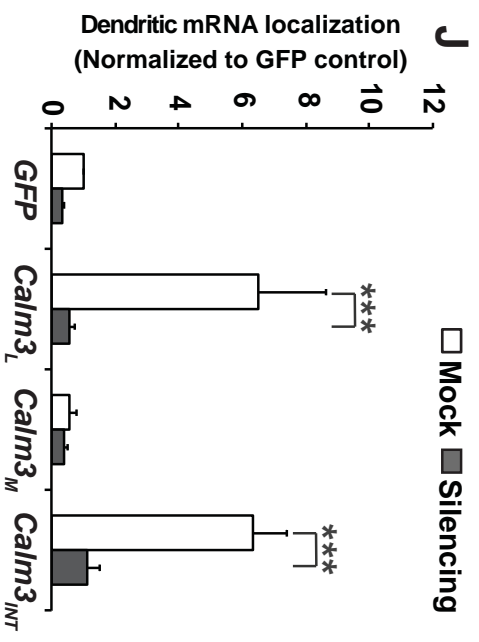
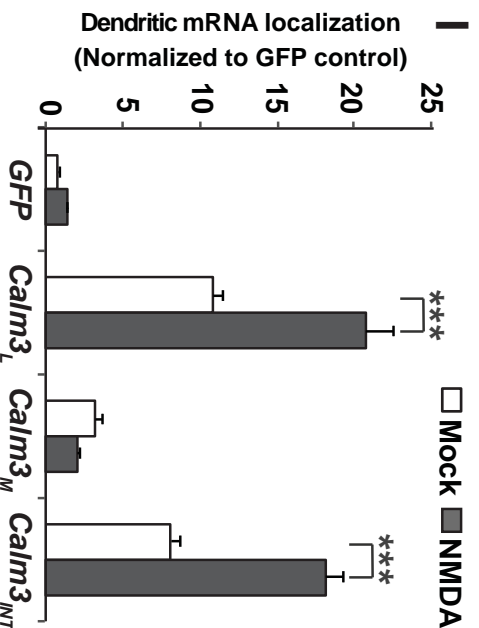
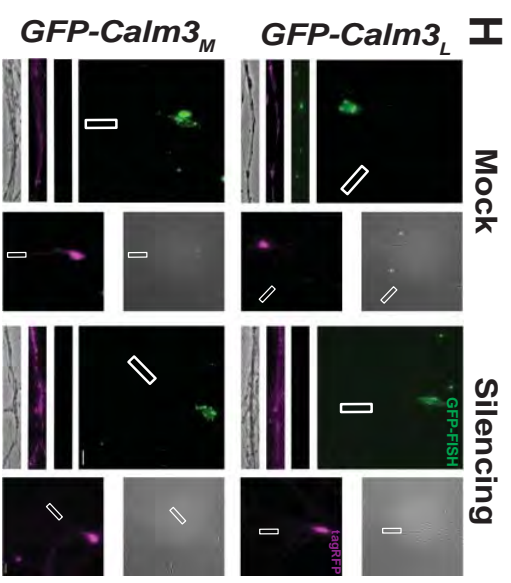
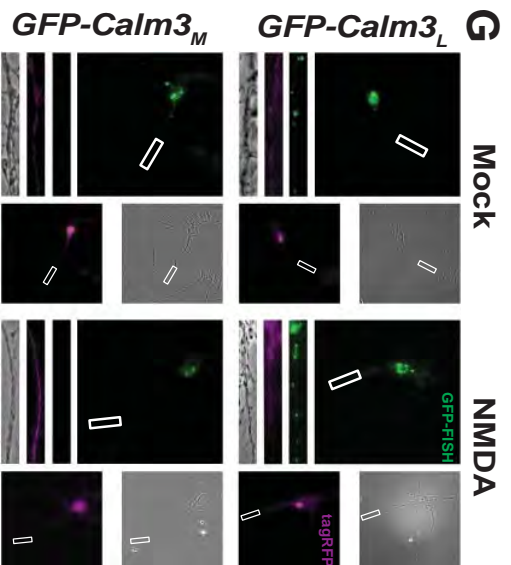
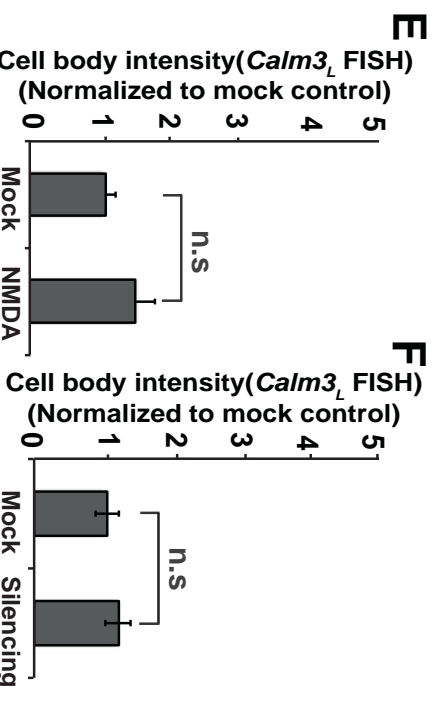
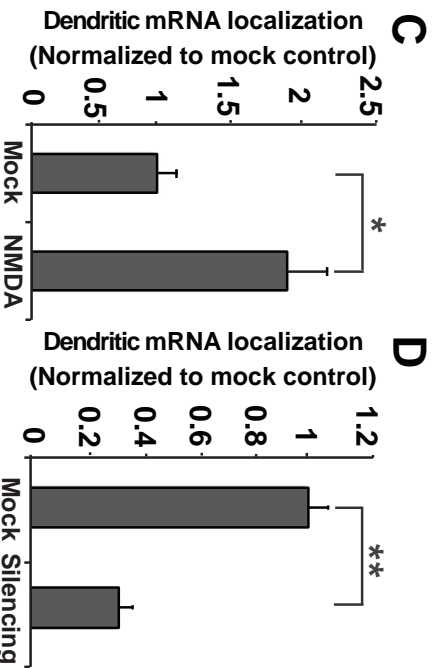
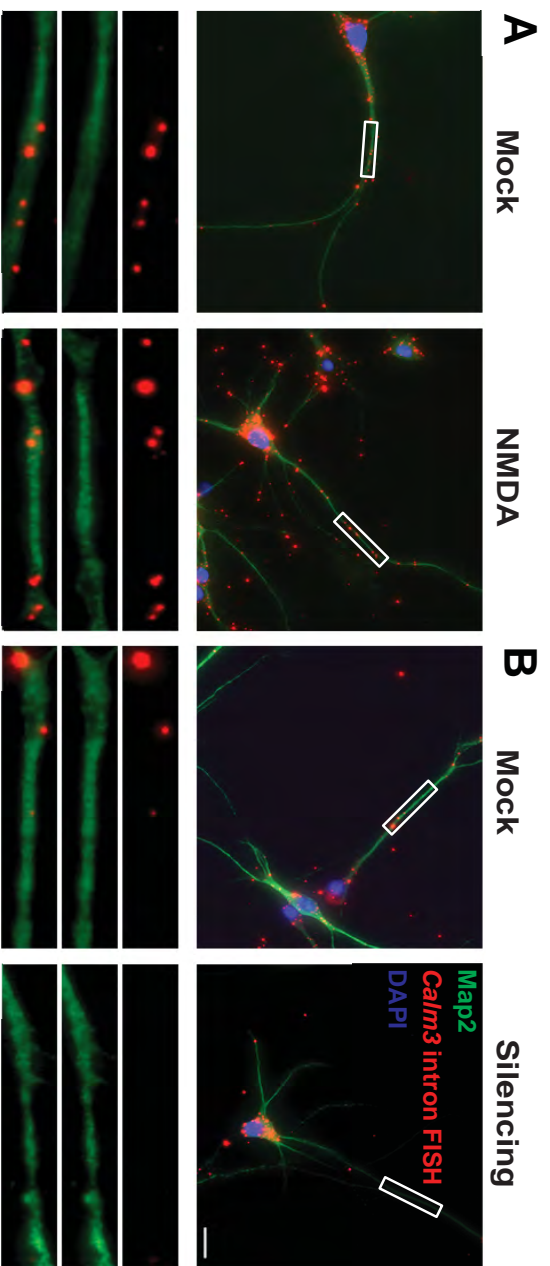
Figure EV3 Stau2 overexpression increases the dendritic localization of *Calm3* intron-containing GFP reporter mRNA. Related to Figure 3.

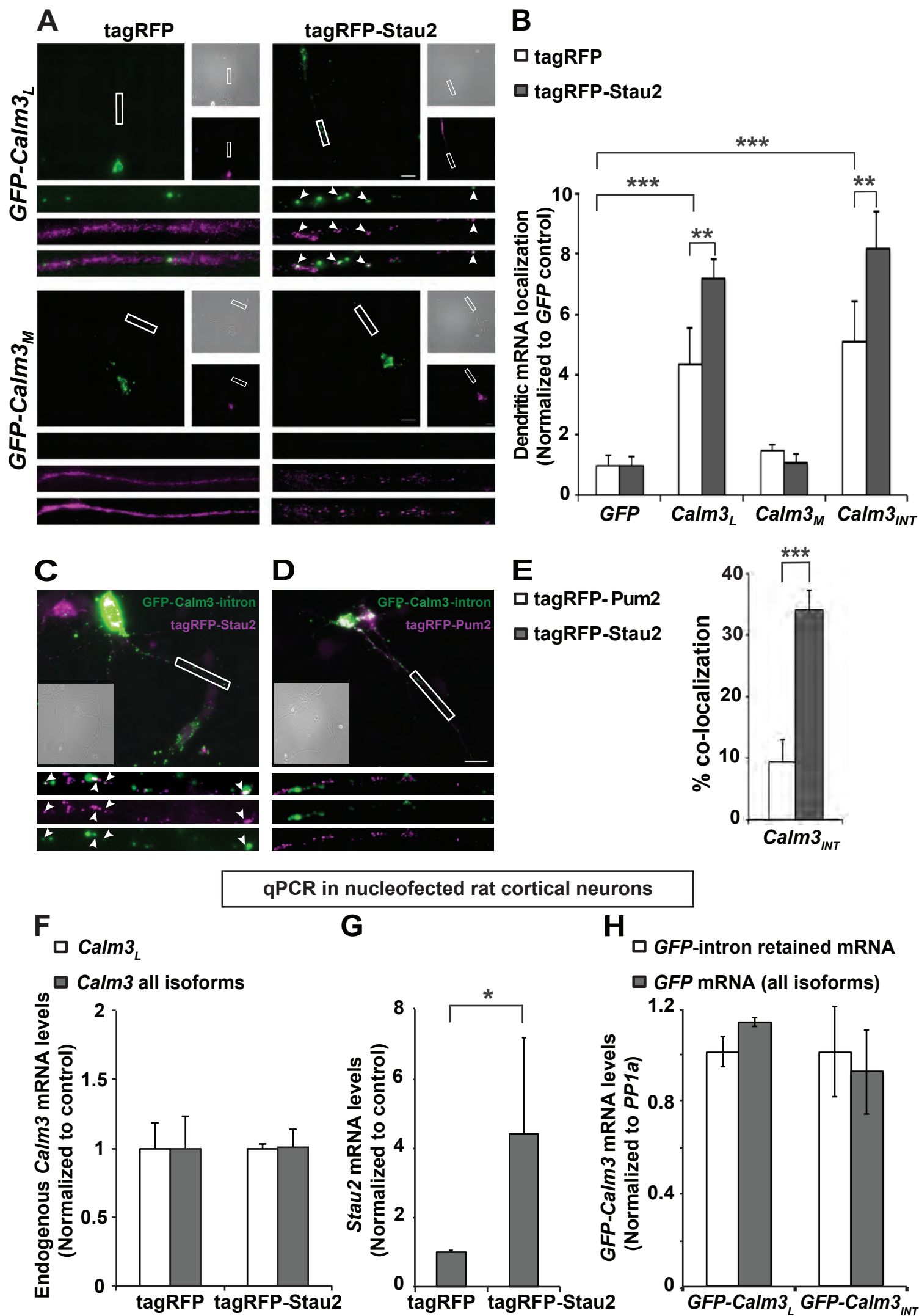
- A,B Representative images of primary rat hippocampal neurons (DIV11), expressing either *GFP- Calm3_{INT}* (A) or *GFP* (B) with co-expression of either tagRFP (left) or tagRFP-Stau2⁶² (right) (both in purple). *GFP* mRNA is detected using a GFP FISH probe (in green); bright field images are also shown. These compliment the data sets shown in Fig 3A,B. Scale bars, 20 μ m.
- C Quantification of fluorescence intensity in the cell body to measure total levels of GFP reporter mRNA (detected by GFP FISH experiments represented in Figs 3A and EV3A,B) using the indicated *Calm3* 3'-UTR constructs with co-expression of either tagRFP or tagRFP-Stau2⁶²; bars represents mean values \pm SEM normalized to respective controls n=3, t-test; p>0.05, n.s= not significant.
- D Quantification of renilla (RL) vs firefly (FL) luciferase mRNA in HeLa cells using the indicated *Calm3* 3'-UTR constructs with co-expression of either tagRFP or tagRFP-Stau2⁶²; n=3, t-test; p>0.05.

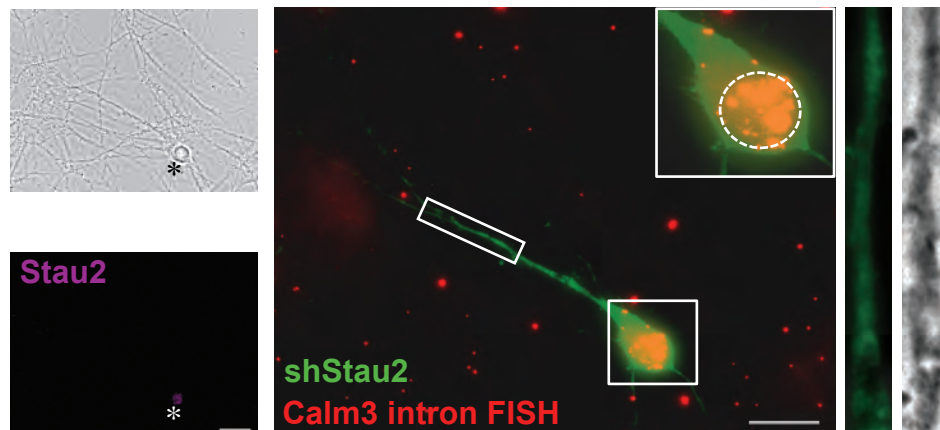
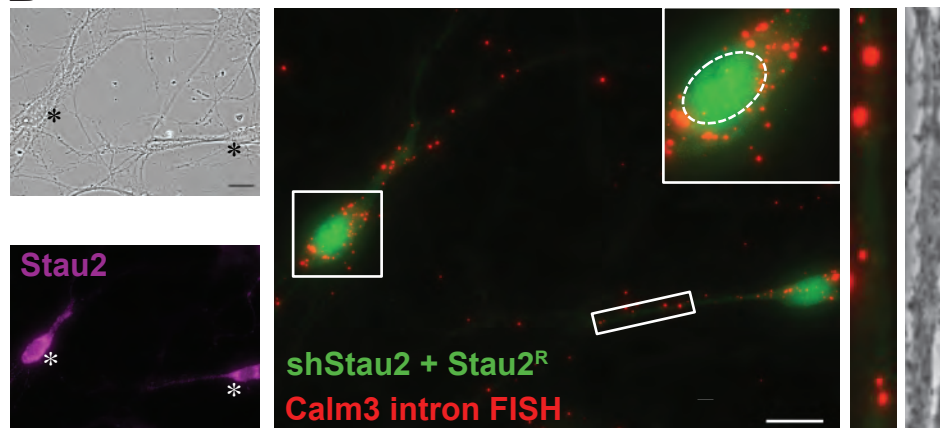
Figure EV4 Stau2 downregulation substantially decreases dendritic localization of endogenous intron-containing *Calm3_L* mRNA. Related to Figure 4.

A,B Representative images of endogenous *Caln3_L* mRNA visualized by a FISH probe directed against the intron (*Caln3* intron-FISH) in primary rat hippocampal neurons expressing a control shRNA with co-expression of either tagRFP (A) or a (tagRFP tagged) RNAi resistant Stau2^R (B). Asterisks indicate shRNA-expressing neurons. Magnified insets on the upper left show cytoplasmic localization of *Caln3_L* mRNA. Magnified boxes on the right show dendritic *Caln3_L* puncta and the corresponding phase image. Selected dendritic regions were at least 2 cell body diameters away from the soma. Panels on the lower left show Stau2 immunostaining and panels on the upper left the corresponding phase contrast. Scale bar, 20µm. These data compliment the data sets represented in Figs 4A, B and C.

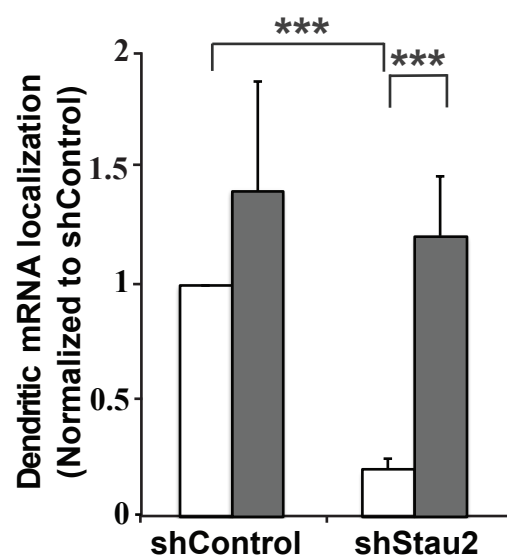




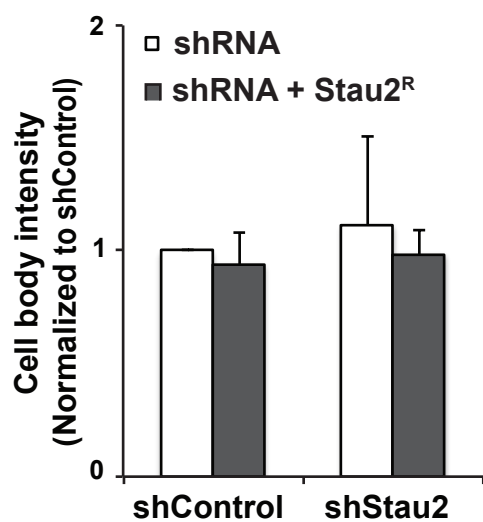
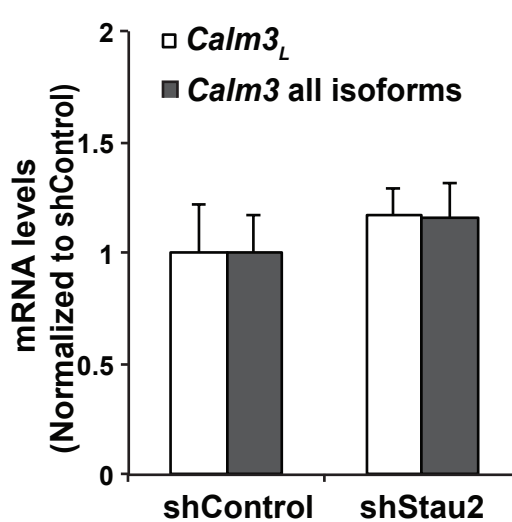


A**B****C**

□ shRNA

■ shRNA + Stau2^R*Calm3* intron FISH

qPCR in rat cortical neurons

D**E****F**